Nangarhar University Social Science
e-ISSN: 3079-2398 (Online) p-ISSN: 3079-238X (Print)
NUSSJ
Vol:2(02), April-June: 2025
Journal Homepage: https://nussj.nu.edu.af

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Mystical Dimensions in the Poetry of Abdul Rahman Baba: A Thematic and Interpretive Analysis

Asadullah Hanifi[1*], *Shukrullah Akif*[2], *Shir Mohammad Ghaljay*[3]

1 Department of Pashto Language and Literature, Faculty of Education, Nimruz University, Afghanistan.
2,3 Department of Pashto, Faculty of Literature and Human studies, Herat University, Afghanistan.

ABSTRACT

This article explores the mystical and Sufi elements in selected poems of Abdul Rahman Baba, a celebrated Pashto poet. Using a qualitative approach based on thematic analysis, the research highlights how Rahman Baba's poetry encourages ethical behavior, spiritual self-awareness, and love for the Creator. The research relies on bibliographic and interpretive methods to uncover these mystical dimensions. The selected poems are examined considering Sufi philosophy, providing insight into themes such as self-purification, divine love, and the inner struggle against the ego. Findings suggest that mysticism forms the core of Rahman Baba's poetry and offers valuable moral and spiritual lessons for contemporary readers. Mystics are sincere friends and well-wishers of humanity. They educate the individuals in such a manner that spiritual and moral excellence becomes vibrant in them. There is close relationship between the teacher and the student. This close relationship ensures the moral therapy and spiritual guidance. The level of achievement of the student is measured by the totality of the student as a person. His Taqwa, piety and moral purity are regarded as superior in value as compared to his attainments in other spheres of life. The spiritual teacher acts not only as the guide to better knowledge but also as the example to better conduct. Teaching is not simply a profession confined to the four-walls of the school or a seminary but also a role to be fully and completely performed.

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords
Sufism, Mysticism, Pashto Poetry, Spiritual Ethics, Soul, Heart.

Article History
Received: 18-04-2025
Accepted: 16-05-2025
Published: 19-05-2025

Cite this Article
Hanifi, A., Akif, S., & Ghaljay, S. M. (2025). Mystical Dimensions in the Poetry of Abdul Rahman Baba: A Thematic and Interpretive Analysis. Nangarhar University Social Science Journal, 2(02), 63–67.
https://doi.org/10.70436/nussj.v2i02.42

Introduction

Sufism and mysticism occupy a central role in many spiritual traditions and serve as key sources of ethical and philosophical thought. In the Pashto literary canon, Abdul Rahman Baba stands as a major mystical poet whose works continue to resonate with audiences. However, there remains a gap in academic analysis of his mystical themes in relation to contemporary human concerns. Mysticism trains the students not to lose sight of the law of causality and its intricate connections; it refers it, to its originator, to Allah (Praise be to Him). The more we learn about the creativity of Allah, the closer our hearts will be brought to Him. God says, “Those truly fears God, among His servants, who have knowledge” (Surrah Fatir, verse 28 (Waheeda, 1991)). A student's thinking will be directed toward Islamic goals and values and his ideology will be shaped by Islam when he is used to examining the nature of each physical phenomena with completely Islamic insight. This will enable people to live in God's presence. Abdulrahman Rahman Baba is a well-known poet, yet his mystical aspects have not received much in-depth study. Through the identification and interpretation of mystical truths found within his chosen poems, this article aims to close that gap.

*Corresponding Author.
Email: asad.hanifi123@gmail.com (*Hanafi, A.*)
https://doi.org/10.70436/nussj.v2i02.42

© 2024 The Authors. Published by Nangarhar University, this is an open access article published under the CC-BY license https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0

Research Questions

1. What mystical elements are present in selected poems of Abdul Rahman Baba?

2. How does his poetry reflect Sufi teachings on self-awareness, divine love, and spiritual growth?

Research Objectives

- To examine mystical themes in Rahman Baba's poetry

- To interpret these themes in light of Sufi philosophy

- To assess their relevance for contemporary moral and spiritual development

Mystical poetry, particularly within the Sufi tradition, emphasizes inner purification, divine love, and the journey of the soul toward God. It uses rich symbolism to express spiritual truth.

In Pashtu, Abdul Rahman Baba, stands out as a leading mystical poet. His verses focus on the heart, soul, divine love, and self-awareness. Parvez Mahjoor Khishki (1999) highlights Rahman Baba's alignment with Sufi ideas such as Unity of Existence and the purification of the self. His Diwan, as edited by Kamil Momand and Qalandar Momand (2018), serves as a key source of spiritual guidance.

Despite Rahman Baba's importance, there is limited focused research on the mystical aspects of his poetry. This study aims to fill this gap by interpreting selected couplets through a Sufi lens and demonstrating their continued relevance in ethical and spiritual discourse.

Methodology

This research employs a qualitative, descriptive, and interpretive method. Selected couplets from *Abdul--Rahman Baba's* poetry was analyzed to identify core mystical themes. The selection was made based on thematic relevance to Sufi concepts such as the heart, soul, divine love, self-awareness, and resistance to ego. Secondary sources, including scholarly commentaries and Sufi texts, were also consulted to support interpretation. Its qualitative part of research where the sources from which the data is received are some literary texts, some documented texts, and some books for the analysis of the literary work. The study helps us in showing many more distinct features of the Islamic mystic practice in the poetic work of Baba Rahman.

Results & Discussion

Abdul Rahman Baba studied with Mullah Muhammad Yusuf Yusufzai and learned jurisprudence and Sufism from him. Then he went to Kohat, studied there, and became a good scholar. He left the city in his youth and used to wander in the mountains a lot. Sometime he traveled to India, he has worship Allah Almighty and has never been busy with worldly affairs. Abdul Rahman Baba was a scholarly person. The clarity of the hidden treasure and the testimony of his speeches show that Abdul Rahman Baba was educated in the sciences of the time and after completing his studies, he extended his hand to inner purification and Sufism and studied the topics with great knowledge (Hashimi, 2020, pp. 195-196).

About mystical love, it has been said that "When divine love is born in a person, a person forgets himself and becomes a lover of man and the world. Currently, a person understands the truth of life. Love is an example of high morals. Love is movement in the world. Love is the cause of progress (Jafari, n.d, p. 293). There is only one truth in the world, and that is self-knowledge. He who has known himself has in fact known Allah and other people. If he does not know himself, he has in fact known nothing in the universe (Khosrowpanah, 2010, p. 44). Kagard argues that the religious life is the only life that is truly satisfying (Mason, 2015, p. 93). The findings suggest that Rahman Baba's work is rich with mystical meaning. His verses consistently call for spiritual purification, detachment from material desires, and intimate connection with the Divine. His use of metaphor (e.g., heart as Kaaba, Jam-e-Jam, fire as purification) aligns with classical Sufi expression.

Importantly, Rahman Baba's emphasis on human decency and ethical living bridges mysticism with social ethics. He offers guidance not only for individual spirituality but also for collective harmony.

۱ـ هغه زړه چې خدای روښان کا جام د جم شي
په دا جام کې ورښـــکاره تمـام عالـــم شـي
۲- په ادم کې د حیوان خویونه شته دي
بیـا هـالــه یې ادم بولــه چې ادم شــي
۳ـ چې خویونه د چارپایو په کې نه وي
سړی هـوښ پـه سړي هلـه مسـلم شي
۴ـ که په ځان باندې قدم کیږدې رحمانه
نـه فلـک بـه دې لاندې تـر قـدم شـــي

(Khishki, 1999, p. 216)

Interpretation of the Above Couplet

1. When Allah Almighty illuminates the heart and it ascends to a state of spiritual elevation, it attains the status of the *Jam-e-Jam*—the mystical Cup of Jam. In this cup,

one can perceive all events, both good and bad. It serves as a mirror to the entire universe, making the hidden dimensions of existence visible through the inner eye.

2. Within every human being lie the traits of both animals and humanity. One truly becomes human when they cultivate and embody the higher moral and spiritual qualities associated with humanity. A human being is, by nature, a composite of conflicting tendencies—spiritual and material, humane and animalistic. To be human, therefore, is to consciously navigate and reconcile these dualities.

3. A person who rises above animalistic and materialistic inclinations—who purifies themselves of base desires—can become a truly enlightened and virtuous human being.

4. Self-reflection, self-exploration, and self-mastery are central themes. When a person truly comes to know themselves, the heavens and the earth metaphorically fall beneath their feet. Such self-awareness grants dominion not in a literal sense, but in the sense of inner mastery and spiritual authority.

According to Abdul Rahman Baba, the heart—when enlightened—becomes a "Jam-e-Jam", capable of grasping the mysteries of the entire universe. It dominates worldly illusions, renders the cosmos intelligible, and enables true understanding. Human beings are imbued with both noble and base traits, and the challenge lies in mastering the latter. The poet emphasizes self-realization, spiritual guidance, and surrendering the ego to the Divine will. When the ego is subdued, the entire cosmos—earth, sky, and even animals—align in harmony with that individual. True obedience to others is ultimately a path of self-discipline and spiritual refinement.

Sufis and mystics often use the terms "heart" and "soul" interchangeably, sometimes attributing to the heart the role of intellect and reason. In this view, the illumination of the heart and intellect within the inner realm of the human being is a divine passion that manifests through love.

۱ـ څه به وايي غم د زړه ابو الهوس ته
څه پوهيږي هلکان په غـم د زړه
۲ـ د خليل تر کعبې دا کعبه ده لويه
چې اباد کا څوک ويران حرم د زړه
(Abdurrahman Baba, 2018, P 151)

Translation and Interpretation of the selected couplets of Abdul Rahman Baba:

1. "The devil and the indulgent fail to comprehend the anguish of the heart. Those who have not disciplined or refined their inner selves remain unaware of the depth and significance of this sorrow."

2. "It is more vital to construct the Kaaba of the human heart than to build "Kaaba of Ibrahim Khalilullah. Spiritual practices and nourishment are necessary for the fortification of the soul. The soul requires training, purification, and refinement.

These verses emphasize the inner, spiritual dimensions of human existence. The true essence of a human being lies not in the physical body but in the inner qualities shaped by the heart and soul. Unlike animals, humans possess a spiritual consciousness, and their significance extends beyond material existence. The superiority of human beings is rooted in their capacity for spiritual growth, with the heart and soul regarded as the most esteemed aspects of their being.

The foundational principle of the doctrine of *Wahdat al-Wujud* (Unity of Existence) lies in the purification of the soul and the cleansing of the inner self. Had Abdul Rahman Baba not personally traversed this path, it is unlikely that such profound spiritual insight would have emerged from his thought. It would be reductive to consider his beliefs as merely inherited through unreflective tradition. His simple yet evocative prose and poetry reflect a deeply personal and transformative spiritual experience (Khishki, 1999, p. 44).

Abdul Rahman Baba's mystical teachings consistently focus on the soul and its various dimensions. He identifies an internal, ongoing struggle within every individual. Central to this struggle is Satan, symbolizing the negative forces that threaten the soul. The human journey, therefore, is a continual battle to overcome these forces and attain spiritual refinement.

۱ـ په عيسی او په جمال کې ګناه نه وه
دا مکـــرونه وو د نفـس او د شـيطان
(Abdurrahman Baba, 2018, P. 109)

We will briefly translate and interpret the following couplets:

1. The state of love is untouched by the corrupting desires of the self (nafs). The self's evil inclinations are powerless in the face of this love.

In mystical thought, the poetry of Abdul Rahman Baba frequently explores the relationship between the soul (rūh) and the self (nafs).

Human beings are intrinsically connected through their souls, which are regarded as divine gifts bestowed by

Allah upon all individuals. However, for the soul to attain strength and elevation, it must embark on a transformative journey—a path of spiritual growth and realization. This journey ultimately leads the soul toward its highest purpose: relation with the divine essence of Allah (Hashimi, 2020, pp. 7–8).

Although all human beings share the same spiritual essence, and the soul itself is a command of Allah, individual differences arise due to the nature of the self. The self encompasses one's desires, actions, ambitions, and personal attributes—shaping everyone's unique identity. A person's experiences, virtues, flaws, and intentions all reside within the self. On the Day of Judgment, it is the self—not the soul—that will be held accountable. All deeds, whether good or sinful, are stored in the self and will be brought forth before Allah's justice.

In contrast, the soul is pure, untouched by human imperfections. It is often described as an internal messenger: abstract, flawless, and radiant. The soul is a reflection of Allah's divine light and represents His hidden authority within the human being (Chamran, 1442 AH, p. 6).

۱ـ عشق څه هسې علم نه دی ـ چې حصلېږي له مکتبه
۲ـ د عاشق مذهب هم دا دی ـ چې دم نه وي بې مطلبه
۳ـ ستا د حسن په تعریف کې ـ رحمان ګنګ دی له ادبه
(Abdurrahman Baba, 2018, P. 174)

***

۵ ـ په ازار د چا راضي مه شه رحمانه
که خلاصی په قیامت غواړې له عذابه
(Abdurrahman Baba, 2018, p. 178)

***

٦ـ بې ځانیه د دونیا له غمه خلاص کړم
لار مې بیا مونده بیرون له شش جهته
(Abdurrahman Baba, 2018, P 178)

***

۷ـ دا ستی چې په اور سوزي مراد یې دا وي
چې په اور کې سوی ښه یم نه بې پته
(Abdurrahman Baba, 2018, P 179)

***

۸ـ ګنج د دور ځار شه د عاشق تر څاڅکي اوښیو
نه خروار د عقل نه د عشق یوه دانه
(Abdurrahman Baba. 2018, P. 200)

Explanation of the Above Verses:

1. Love is not a form of knowledge that can be acquired through formal education or academic instruction. Rather, it is a deeply personal and spiritual experience—a connection with the Divine and a journey inward toward the self.
2. In the state of divine love, the lover's every breath and action carry profound significance. Each moment is lived with awareness and intention. Their thoughts, words, and even their breathing are measured, immersed in constant remembrance and contemplation of God.
3. The beauty of God is beyond human comprehension. It is not possible to grasp or articulate the nature of Divine beauty. For this reason, Abdul Rahman Baba employs metaphor and symbolic language, and at times, chooses silence—acknowledging that words fall short when attempting to describe the majesty of the Creator.
4. Abdul Rahman Baba invokes a prayerful plea: that no human being should experience sorrow or suffering. Liberation, he suggests, lies in upholding the rights of others and fulfilling one's moral and social responsibilities.
5. In the love of God, the poet experiences a state of selflessness. This dissolution of the ego brings liberation from worldly anxieties and attachments. In this state, he perceives the presence of Allah in all six directions—everywhere he turns.
6. Within Sufi tradition, the mystics willingly embrace spiritual trials—often described metaphorically as fire—to achieve their aim: surrender, divine love, and passionate longing. To them, this burning is more valuable than a life lived in spiritual emptiness or mediocrity.
7. A single drop of true love can disrupt even the most carefully guarded treasure of worldly intellect and reason. In Baba's view, one grain of love outweighs a heap of intellect—it holds a far deeper, more transformative power.
8. Each of these couplets contains a profound mystical message. Many philosophers have argued that the five senses cannot lead us to ultimate truth; their role is merely protective—preventing physical harm rather than enabling spiritual insight. In Abdul Rahman Baba's poetry, Sufi mystical teachings are central. His spiritual insights resonate not only within Sufi traditions but also within later periods of spiritually rich literature, albeit with unique expressions and *nuances.*

When the researchers read out the poetry of this high caliber poet, we just realized the literary wealth of this man. We, for obvious, can count him as a Sufi poet and a saint. This would be a breach of trust with the work of this man.

We can explore his work from many linear perspectives which could be a good addition to the universal literature.

We can count him in as a romantic poet, could be explored for cultural delineation of his

Pashtun society. His Folklore literature can be explored and his aphoristic writing style cannot be denied in anyway. His work is an open invitation for the researchers of universal literature.

Research Limitations

- Limited number of poems selected

- Focus primarily on thematic analysis, not historical or philological detail

Conclusion

Abdul Rahman Baba emerges as a deeply mystical poet whose message is timeless. His poetry addresses fundamental questions of existence, the nature of the soul, and the path to God. This study contributes to understanding the moral and spiritual guidance embedded in Pashto literature. Heart is the first and last moving part of body. Changes occur inside.

The human heart has three positions, and the hearts of angels and animals all have the same position for the reflection of God's light. They believe that the heart that does not change with the reflection of God's light is like an animal. Our research on Baba Rahman's poetry is fundamental to Islamic mystic practice. A few of Abdur Rahman Baba's works were selected for purely qualitative research studies, and the researcher tried to interpret Baba's poetry in the context of Islamic mystic practice. Additionally, an effort was made to identify Sufi ideas and thoughts in Baba Rahman's poetry. Relatively many qualitative renditions are fabricated.

The first study topic posed is how Baba Rahman's writings embody aspects of Islamic mysticism. The poetry of the poet was carefully read. Numerous verses on Islamic mysticism were discovered by the scholars. He appears to be a brilliant moralist because of the way the ideas and themes are expressed. He advises us to abide by the priceless guidelines. Those who heed his counsel will be fortunate and greatly favored. He claims that everything recorded in the Holy Quran and Hadith is reflected in his poems. These two teachings are attributed to Muslims by their Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and their Creator, Allah. The second question that is brought up is how Baba Rahman portrays moral and religious themes. The answer to the query was discovered by carefully reading his work. In his work, we witnessed a straightforward portrayal of the Quran and Hadith. He chooses passages from the Holy Quran and sayings of Muhammad (PBUH), the Last Messenger, that are full of suitable actions and call all living people to follow the path to achievement. The research has been conducted with assistance from other resources. Books, research papers, and publications that were pertinent were read in order to gain a thorough comprehension. It's important to note the assistance obtained from YouTube debates and lectures. Maulana Rumi, regarded as the patriarch of Islamic mysticism, is our Sufi theorist. He has done so much in the Sufi sector that hundreds of studies have been written about him. We think this will continue as the researchers attempt to examine him from other angles.

References

Chamran, M. (2020). Man and God. Translated by Naqeeb Ahmad Azizi. Kabul: Peace Studies Research and Publishing Center.

Hashimi, S. A. (2020). History of Pashto Poetry (First and Second Edition). (Second Edition) Peshawar: Qalam Publishing Society.

Jafari, A. Q. (n.d.). The Harmony of Love and Friendship of Maulana with the Present Age. India: Allahabad University.

Khishki, A. (2005). The Collected Works of Arzani Khishki. Ed. Parvez Mahjoor Khishki. Peshawar: Pashto Academy.

Khishki, P. M. (1999). The Path of Love and Rahman Baba. In M. J. Khalil (Ed.), Rahman Baba Appreciation Collection. Lahore: Pashto Academy.

Khosrowpanah, A., & Mirzaei, R. (2011). The Quiddity of Anthropology. Vol. 7. Iss24. Iran: Religious Studies of Humanity.

Mason, J. (2015). Soren Kierkegaard and the Three Forms of Life. Human Magazine. Translated by Mohammad Atif Faqirzai. Fourth Edition. Kabul: Human Magazine Administration.

Rahman Baba. (2018). The Diwan of Rahman Baba. Ed. Kamil Momand & Qalandar Momand. Peshawar: University Book Agency.

Waheeda, A. M. (1991). Al Quranul Karim. peshawar : Al Maktabatul Waheeda .